THE

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. III. December 31, 1937 Tebet 27, 5698 No. 17.

EDITORIALS

ALIEN MESSIAHS

A DISSERVICE TO AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

BLAME THE SUN SPOTS!

ABRABANEL AND THE END OF AN ERA

By Solomon Grayzel

AN EPIC OF FATHERHOOD

By Dora Edinger

CORRESPONDENCE

Published by

THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM

15 West 86th Street, New York, N. Y.

IN THE 1937 YEAR BOOK OF THE
CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

in the Section Called

"CONTEMPORANEOUS LITERATURE"

THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES ARE FOUND:

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The RECONSTRUCTIONIST is published bi-weekly for twenty consecutive issues starting in October, by The Society for the Advancement of Judaism, 15 West 86th St., New York, N. Y. Subscription $1.00 a year; foreign $1.25; individual copy 10 cents. Entered as second class matter January 9, 1935, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.
The editorials represent the opinions of the editors only.
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EDITORIALS

Alien Messiahs

WHEN the U.S.S.R. opened up Birobidjan to Jewish colonization, Jewish communists hailed this action as confirmation of their claim that only through the triumph of communism would the Jewish problem be solved. Palestine under the mandate of a capitalistic empire offered no sure haven for the Jewish masses, but Birobidjan provided the basis for a free Jewish republic to take its place along with the other socialist republics of the Soviet Union. There and not in Zion was to be the true Jewish national home, for Erez Yisrael was sure to be dominated by predatory capitalism and to be made the cat's paw for British imperialism.

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST, while it never for a moment wavered in its allegiance to Palestine as the Jewish national home, was sympathetic toward the effort to settle in Birobidjan those Jews who wished to live under a communist regime. But now Russia, for reasons best known to herself, has decided to close Birobidjan to Jewish immigration from outside the Soviet Union. It has thus closed another door in the face of the disinherited Jewish masses. Nevertheless there are still Jews among us who look to communism for the solution of the Jewish problem and regard the communist revolution as the harbinger of the messianic era for our people as well as for the rest of mankind.

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST is not given to red-baiting. It will continue to look with sympathetic interest and with hope, if not with blind faith, to economic and social developments in Russia. But it cannot ignore the danger of permitting interest in revolutionary socialism to blind Jews to the need of Jewish self-emancipation. It cannot but feel that there is something pathological in the eagerness with which young Jews are so often willing to sacrifice the interests of the Jewish society into which they were born to the "larger" interests of a utopian society that is not yet in existence and may never come to be. Why must Jewish communists be more communistic than Stalin? Why are they ever ready to condone the dictatorship of the proletariat when it postpones the inauguration of the classless and truly communistic society in order that Russia may maintain her position vis-a-vis the capitalist powers while they invariably condemn Jews who concern themselves with Jewish national interests. They are not satisfied if Jews seek to establish a social commonwealth of Jews in Palestine and cooperate with non-Jews in endeavors to socialize human society in general. They demand

that Jews be the first to offer up their own nation as a sacrifice on the altar of world-revolution. They would have Jews surrender their own destiny unreservedly into the hands of a party control which is not in the least concerned with the Jewish problem as such, as though the proletarian dictatorship were the long-awaited Messiah.

How can we understand that peculiar quirk in the minds of young Jews which demands a cessation of all Jewish national and communal activity in the interest of labor's struggle against capitalism, and will not even concede to Jewish labor groups the right to seek the productivization of the Jewish masses, or to combat anti-Jewish discrimination in the field of employment, or to band together for common cultural objectives? It would probably astound our young Jewish communists to be told that their attitude has the same psychological foundation as that on which rested the allegiance of the German Jewish bourgeoisie to Reformist Judaism a century ago. Nevertheless this is the truth. Back of the eagerness of the Jewish communists to throw in their lot with the laboring class without distinction of national, racial and religious affiliation lies the attempt to escape the hard lot of being a Jew, to run to the protection of a gentile group that is willing to take them in as individuals although indifferent if not hostile to every manifestation of the collective spirit of the Jewish people.

Self-emancipation is a hard and trying task. It imposes a responsibility almost too heavy to bear. There thus arises the demand for a psychological escape, for an opiate against the *Judenschmerz.* This demand finds satisfaction in the assumption that all will be well with future generations of Jews once capitalism is overthrown and communism set up in its place. Assimilation without an ideology appears selfish and ignoble, but communist dialectic provides a welcome rationalization for the renunciation of Jewish ties. It makes it possible for Jews to conceal from themselves the motive of their flight from responsibility for Jewish life by disguising it as a voluntary renunciation of group interests for the sake of humanity. Is this not similar to the psychological reaction of those Jews who a century ago repudiated Jewish nationalism in the interest of liberalism and humanitarianism?

In the world of "liberty, equality and fraternity" which the bourgeois revolution was expected to inaugurate, what need of Zion, the Hebrew language or Jewish law! Napoleon's gesture of convening a Jewish Sanhedrin was then taken as seriously by the protagonists of Reformism as Russia's gesture of establishing a Jewish republic is taken by modern Jewish communists. Of course, the Sanhedrin had to meet Napoleon's terms, and the Jewish republic in Birobidjan would similarly have to meet the terms of the proletarian dictator as a condition of its existence. The Russian policy of recognizing national cultural differences has been described as a policy of permitting every nation within Russia to speak its own language provided that they all say the same thing. One hundred years after Napoleon there is still a Jewish problem. We have no guarantee that one hundred years after Stalin, there will not remain a Jewish problem.

This is not said in criticism of Russia or of the communist movement as such. The Jewish problem is not their problem. The emancipation of the Jews from all that interferes with their free and creative living is a Jewish responsibility which Jews have no right to evade. This does not mean that Jewish workers need stand aloof from the general struggle of the working class against capitalistic exploitation. But it does mean that Jewish workers shall interest themselves in the productivization of Jewish labor in Palestine and everywhere, that they shall seek to combat discrimination against the employment of Jews whether by Jews or non-Jews, that they shall be ready to collaborate with Jews of all classes in all ways consistent with their socialist principles, for the building up of the Jewish

homeland, the relief of Jewish suffering and the promotion of Jewish culture.

In ancient times the prophets denounced many of their contemporaries among the Jewish people for depending on Babylon or on Egypt for their salvation. We today must also not lean on alien powers and seek redemption from alien Messiahs. Israel must be its own Messiah. Distressing as is the withdrawal of the promise of Birobidjan from the point of view of its effect on Jewish populations for whom life is made intolerable in their native land and who have no place that will accord them a welcome, it may not prove an unmitigated evil. For it should open the eyes of some of our Jewish communists to the fact that there are Jewish problems which Jews must solve for themselves since the Communist Party is no dependable Messiah for solving them.

A Disservice to American Democracy

ONE of the great needs of the hour is an effective formula for coping with the challenge of fascism. That the fascist menace is serious, recent events have made abundantly clear. Have we not already at least one illustration of American fascism in action? What else shall we call the Government of "I-am-the-Law" Hague of Jersey City? In order to keep out the C.I.O., Mr. Hague has repeatedly defied the traditional procedures of law and order, and destroyed the constitutional guarantees of civil liberty. We who believe in democracy will have to give more serious thought to the challenge of these anti-democratic forces that have recently presented themselves so brazenly before the American public.

One thing is certain: we cannot curb fascism by legislating it out of existence. Any legislative action against anti-democratic groups would itself be a violation of the democratic process. Such legislation would moreover have to be couched in very general terms, and it would be left to the courts to determine, in specific instances, what constitutes a subversive, anti-democratic movement or activity. It would be a most dangerous weapon indeed to place in the hands of reactionary judges who would use it without a doubt against progressive and liberal groups. Such legislation, ostensibly designed to protect democracy, might well prove to be a Trojan horse within which tyranny would enter to violate the temple of our freedom. This is why we supported the stand of Mayor LaGuardia when he issued a permit for a Nazi parade in the city of New York.

But this does not mean that the friends of democracy can remain neutral in the face of the rising growth of American fascism. It certainly does not justify the procedure of the Union College in Schenectady, N. Y., in inviting Fritz Kuhn, Nazi spokesman, to present his theory before the students of the college. The authorities of the Union College defended their action on the grounds that liberals ought to hear all points of view before making up their minds, and that they were trying to rear their students in the liberal tradition. It doesn't matter that only 22 out of close to 300 students were willing to vote in favor of fascism after listening to its defense by Mr. Kuhn.

The procedure of the Union College was essentially a disservice to the cause of American democracy. It recognized fascism as a legitimate, political philosophy which Americans could entertain. This is treason to the democratic tradition. We may defend the legal rights of the fascist to speak, but we must at the same time expose him for the menace that he is to public welfare. Certainly we must not give him a forum from which to speak, and encourage people to hear him expound his vicious doctrine.

The history of the triumph of fascism in Germany should have taught us at least this lesson: If liberals want to help save our country from the reversion to barbarism which fascism represents, they will have to remove themselves from the

fence to enter the arena where the social issues of the day are being fought out. Our weapons must be such as are consistent with a democratic process, public education and enlightenment; but they must be applied no less energetically if our cause is not to fail. Is it expecting too much that institutions dedicated to learning and to truth shall share in this task?

Blame The Sun Spots!

IT is not generally recognized that the rabbinate too suffers from an occupational disease. The malady of which we would speak befalls but one or two rabbis each year, and then only at certain specific seasons, such as the month of December and the weeks before the Easter celebration of the Christian Church. The course of the ailment is marked by successive recognizable stages: first a pronouncement by the afflicted rabbi, then great public excitement attended by furious discussion, and finally a retraction by the patient in the form of an assertion that he was misunderstood or misquoted. The rabbi in question generally recovers. But he leaves his community shaken and distrustful of the good sense and integrity of the people who preside over synagogues. In brief, this disease is unique in that the consequences are felt by everyone except the person who suffered from it. We refer, of course, to the annual epidemic of sermons urging Jews to "accept" Jesus.

What is responsible for such outbreaks in the pulpit? Does the rabbi who makes the suggestion imagine that Jews would by following it take to themselves a higher ethic than that which they have professed heretofore? He does not, for he is infallibly cautious to point out that the Christian morality is in no way superior to the Jewish. Does he believe that Jesus is indeed a God-man? He does not, for he is invariably careful to indicate that Jesus should be regarded as a "minor prophet," a "moral teacher," a "younger sage." Indeed, is the rabbi in question serious about his recommendation? If so, why does he offer it in the form of a sermon addressed to a typical congregation which is powerless to translate the idea into reality? The experience of other rabbis before him should have taught him that such pulpit messages are woefully inefficacious in effecting the objective he desires. Why does he not rather, if he is indeed in earnest, lay his convictions before rabbinical assemblies, or treat with it in publications devoted to the earnest discussion of Jewish religious issues?

How then shall we account for the phenomenon? The alternative explanations are these. It is either a case of a mental aberration caused by mysterious factors—the sun spots perhaps, or it is an instance of a thirst for publicity, the desire to be quoted, to see one's name in headlines, to be regarded as a bold, thoughtful pulpit personality, to get one's self known. We shudder from the latter interpretation. We prefer to believe the former. So many things are blamed on solar disturbances these days, that it is time we Jews too utilized the excuse as a rationalization for some of the ugly circumstances of our group life.

But, if our readers hold to the less attractive hypothesis, that of a thirst for publicity, then reluctantly we must admit the existence of two corroborative evidences for their theory.

The first of these is the newspaper advertisements published by synagogues. Certainly, the Jews of New York must know of the existence of its congregations and the character of their services. Why then must they be forever reminded? What is more, why should sermon subjects be so carefully phrased to intrigue interest? Most revealing of all, why can not synagogues, if they must advertise, be content with normal denominational listings? Why need they have large special blocks for themselves, in bold type, in especially distinguished positions on the religious page of the *Times*? Reluctantly, we are driven to admit the plausibility of the claim that synagogues and rabbis are competing with each other for public notice.

The second confirming evidence in fa-

vor of the "publicity" explanation is the publication of abstracts of sermons. The naive layman is prone to believe that these excerpts are recorded by reporters sent especially to "cover" pulpit messages. And if his rabbi is not quoted, he resents the fact; he feels that his rabbi is not so prominent as others, that the prestige of his congregation has been lowered, that he has been affronted personally. Wherefore let the truth be known. It is the rabbis themselves who submit what is printed on Sunday or Monday morning. Only rarely do the newspapers do the job themselves. But why do rabbis trouble themselves to inform the world at large of what they have said? Is it in the praiseworthy effort to spread their teaching the more widely? But the excerpts printed are so brief as to be either unintelligible or, as we sometimes prefer to believe, a distortion of the actual sermon. Certainly, the ten lines abstracted from a half-hour's lecture can scarcely be regarded as an instrument of education. Alas, once more, we are forced to the unpleasant conclusion that the rabbis want publicity, some by choice, others in order to meet the competition.

The whole matter is, to be sure, trivial and of little consequence. Fortunately, Jewish life in America is full, loyalty-evoking, creative and gracious. Since the pulpit has so effectively taught Jews their religion and morality, has informed them so completely in their heritage and enlightened them so thoroughly of the problems of their group and society generally, it can be allowed its occasional aberrations. After all, now that rabbis have fulfilled their function, they can be permitted to play with spectacular sermons and to get a little personal recognition on the side. And Jewish life is aesthetically so perfect, it has so little which will offend the sensibilities of sensitive people and alienate them from itself, that an occasional ugliness such as competitive advertising does not matter. No one need be concerned over a tiny blemish on an otherwise prefect face.

But suppose, by a broad stretch of the imagination, these happy circumstances did not prevail. Suppose Jewish loyalty, understanding, organization and interest were in a bad way, suppose there were much in Jewish life that was so distasteful as to alienate thinking Jews—then the situation would be different. Then it would be unpardonable for rabbis and synagogues to be less than earnest in their preaching, less than immaculate in their good taste.

Abrabanel and the End of an Era

By Solomon Grayzel*

A LONG history like that of the Jews is bound to be rich in anniversaries. Two years ago we celebrated the 800th anniversary of Maimonides' birth. Two years from now we shall celebrate the 900th anniversary of Rashi's birth. This year it is the turn of Isaac Abrabanel, born five hundred years ago (1437). Were one to ask what is the outstanding quality which each of these men brings to mind, I suppose the answer would be that Maimonides makes one think of the Jew's intellectuality, Rashi of his piety, and Isaac Abrabanel of the Jew's loyalty to his people and his faith.

Obviously this is a generalization, since each of the men possessed also the qualities attributed to the others. Yet, if history is to serve the pedagogic purpose of providing inspiration and guidance for those who study it, it is well to indulge occasionally in such generalizations. To Hein-

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rich Heine is attributed the remark, "We learn from history that we learn nothing from history." The present state of the world sufficiently proves the extent to which such pessimism is justified. But that it is not altogether justified is proved by Isaac Abrabanel's own life, and the life of his Jewish contemporaries. One may hope that an appreciation of his life will serve to strengthen loyalty and self-respect in an age when these qualities are once more sorely needed, in a generation which, in some important respects, resembles the one of which he was a leading personality. Furthermore, we may be helped through his story to note what the world and the Jewish people lost through the calamity of the Spanish Expulsion.

This brief essay, however, aims to do no more than point out a few of the important aspects of a very interesting life. The bibliography of few Jews offers so much drama and inspiration as are to be found in the life of this many-sided personality; financier, diplomat, scholar, preacher, man of affairs and mystic combined.

I

For a century and a quarter the Abrabanel family mirrored the fate of the Iberian Jews. In his dignities and honors and in his closeness to the Court of Castile, Samuel Abrabanel, grandfather of Isaac, reflected the opportunities open to his fellow-Jews during the Fourteenth Century. Yet how shaky were the foundations of his life and of Jewish life in general became apparent when the storm broke in that year of fury, 1391. Thousands offered up their lives, and many more thousands their religion, to the fanaticism of the mob, beginning that chain of events which led from Marranism to the expulsion one hundred years later. Samuel Abrabanel was among those seeming converts to Christianity, and like many of them showed by his subsequent actions how hard it was for an intelligent Jew to adopt the faith of his persecutors. His flight from Spain illustrates what many others in his position did. He went to neighboring Portugal, and there cast the cross aside, without being able to cast aside the terrors of imminent danger.

The growing threat to Jewish life in Castile may have caused Samuel and his descendants to congratulate themselves upon their comparative security in Portugal. But such security was not for long. The changing political situation drove Isaac Abrabanel back to the land from which his grandfather had fled, there to unite his fate with that of the doomed Jewish community. The Spanish monarchs made use of Isaac for their own purposes just as they used the rest of the Jews of their lands. But, when that purpose was achieved, he went into exile along with those others who would not surrender their Jewish loyalties. Broken-hearted as were the other Jews, his books lost, as was Spanish-Jewish culture generally, his hard-earned fortune gone as was the good fortune of his fellow-Jews, Isaac and his family, symbols of the larger Jewish tragedy, sought a home wherever they could find one.

Nor does the parallel between the Abrabanels and those generations of Jews cease with Isaac; it can be traced also in the lives of his descendants. His sons added glory to the places where they settled, while one of his grandsons, kidnapped by the Church when still a child, was lost to the Jewish people as were thousands of others. It is the bitter irony of history that Judah Leon Abrabanel wrote his *Dialogues on Love* in which he, exiled by hate and bigotry, a father bereft of his child, the disciple of the Religion of the Law, urged the Christian world to recognize that Divine Love is the motive of life. Therein may lie an even broader parallel, between the Abrabanels and the Jewish people of all subsequent generations down to our own.

II

Not only Isaac's external life, but also his mind reflected his age. He wrote much, but failed to show any kinship to the in-

tellectual greatness of Maimonides. He felt and dreamed for his people and for humanity, but did not reach the spiritual depth of Rashi. Two forces operated in the molding of his mind: the Renaissance in the intellectual life of Western Europe, and the decadence in the social status of the Spanish Jews. The one broadened his horizon; the other gave his mind that tinge of mysticism which is characteristic of his writings. Thus, Isaac Abrabanel stands out as an example of the breadth of Spanish-Jewish culture, as well as of the fate of the Sephardic intellect which was soon to lose itself in Messianic vagaries.

In Abrabanel this was a result of the inner struggle which had gone on within the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula during the fifteenth century when the human desire for security came in conflict with religious loyalty and intellectual sincerity. Such conflicts inevitably produce a type of apologetics, with which we of this day are also familiar, in which the writer attempts to justify his stand not alone before the world at large, but also, and perhaps primarily, to himself in order to strengthen his own resolve. The bitterness of the attacks on Judaism by converts to Christianity, like Paul of Burgos and Geronimo de Sante Fé, are psychologically explainable on the basis of such an inner need; and the defense of Judaism, involving a respectful attitude toward Christianity, by Joseph Albo and Isaac Abrabanel, were similarly motivated. Abrabanel speaks of the frequent occasions when he disputed on religion with Christians, even with kings, and he also says that he was writing not so much to be read by others as for his own pleasure. Even though the assurance that he did not desire to parade his thoughts be accepted as a harmless personal conceit, it may not be amiss to put together these two statements and conclude that in him too religious controversy aroused the need for self-justification.

This inner struggle in a sense fixed the nature and the content of Abrabanel's writings. Always interested in secular literature, philosophy and science, the upper class of Spanish Jewry was led further along the same road by the secularistic interests of the Renaissance. But they were attacked for their Jewishness, for the law and culture with which they were but inadequately acquainted. It is not surprising, therefore, to find some of them meeting regularly for the purpose of acquiring more knowledge about themselves. Isaac Abrabanel relates that some of his works had their origin in lectures delivered before a group of friends gathered in his home at regular intervals for the purpose of discussing Judaism and the Bible. This explains why Abrabanel's works have a sermonic flavor; also why he is so diffuse and wordy. But even more important, this explains why Marranos are spoken of with comparative sympathy, and why the attacks on Judaism by apostate Jews are refuted with far greater bitterness than similar attacks by native Christians. Isaac Abrabanel was the leader of a Jewish study circle to which belonged men presumably of his own financial and social standing. These were men in search of solace and inner adjustment, who turned to the most respected, and, incidentally, most successful one among them for the elucidation of questions which he, better equipped than any of them in matters Jewish, was able to answer. Furthermore, they preferred him to any of the official teachers of Judaism whose general cultural preparation was not equal to that of the Jewish grandees.

For in Isaac Abrabanel was carried on the Spanish-Jewish tradition of acquaintance with general culture. His Jewish references cover a wide range, and include the names of practically every Jewish author of consequence in philosophical, historical, poetic, and biblical subjects. In addition, Abrabanel cites non-Jewish works. He does not hesitate to refer and even accept Christian interpretations of the Bible. He shows acquaintance with ancient Greek and Roman works, sometimes through secondary sources, but usually through direct contact. The like can be said about his knowledge of Mohammedan works on

philosophy. Clearly, Abrabanel was a child of the age of Humanism, and the tendencies of that age were not lost on him. His approach was critical-historical, rather than midrashic or philological or philosophical. Such was the spirit of his age and that is what met the needs of his audience.

To be sure, one cannot at any time feel in him the modern man in the same sense in which Erasmus was modern. A trace of mysticism may be found already in his early writings. That, too, may be attributed to his place and time, to the longings of his fellow-Jews that their sacrifice and suffering would be justified in time. As Abrabanel grew older, and as Jewish misfortunes multiplied, he leaned more heavily upon his Messianic hopes. His Messianic trilogy was written after the expulsion. His own days were interpreted as showing the pre-Messianic pangs (*Hable Mashiah*). A final war between the Christians and the Mohammedans was to be the War of Gog and Magog. It was to be a new crusade, not at all unlikely in his day. Then, within a few years, when the constellations would be favorable, he expected the Messiah to appear. A later work was written on the subject of Reward and Punishment and on Resurrection, but the manuscript was destroyed when the French troops invaded Naples. It was thus possible to see in Abrabanel not only the mentality of the Jews of his own day, but also the beginnings of the type of mysticism which was to envelop the mind of Sephardic Jewry a generation later.

III

Three points in Abrabanel's apologetic system deserve particular mention, since they indicate the manner of justifying his own loyalty and therefore also the loyalty of those who came under his influence: the contrast between Judaism and Christianity, Judaism and its teaching about Society, and the position of the Jewish people.

In his private disputations with Christians, Abrabanel had learned to maintain an even temper. Besides, he must have realized that sharp polemics against the dominent faith would have reacted most unfavorably upon the Jews in general. Nevertheless, while not indulging in vituperation, he did not hedge, but boldly indicated the differences between Judaism and Christianity. As might have been expected, the attitude toward the Messiah held a central place. Throughout his writings, whether in the exegetical works or in the books especially devoted to Messianic speculation, he never neglected to refute biblical interpretations of a Christological nature. In fact, he went farther, and found in the Bible passages which he interpreted a warning against Christianity. In Isiah 52:5, for example, the words "And My Name continually all the day is blasphemed" was said to be a hint (*Remez*) "to the faith of Jesus the Nazarene whom the Romans have adopted (thus) expressing themselves with regard to God in corporeal terms."

This matter of the incorporeality of God he considered basic to the entire situation. It is significant from the point of view of Marranism and its continuance in subsequent generations that Abrabanel made this an article of faith with regard to which compromise was impossible. Ignorance of it did not excuse one, so that even if a Jew were not aware of the Jewish teaching on incorporeality he nevertheless must be considered a heretic if he thought of God in corporeal terms.

To Abrabanel's desire to clarify the differences between Judaism and Christianity must be attributed the sharp issue he took with Crescas and Albo and his ardent defense of Maimonides and his creeds. The generations which separated Abrabanel from Crescas and Albo had wrought a change in the needs of the Spanish Jews. The earlier philosophers had felt the need of showing the basic similarities betwen Judaism and Christianity. One may well assume that Abrabanel felt his own generation to be in greater need of showing his people how

widely apart the two religions were in order that they might not be tempted to yield to conversion. Albo tried to soften the attack. Abrabanel wanted to strengthen the defense. He rejected Albo's basic principles (God, Revelation, Reward and Punishment) not because they were not true, but because they were false emphases. He preferred Maimonides' creeds, for they implied the principles of the other philosophers, and, at the same time, brought to light the differences between a false and a true religion. The incorporeality of God, the denial of an intermediary, and the eternity of the Torah must serve as the real defenses of Judaism.

Altogether the views of the philosophers were distasteful to Abrabanel. It has been said that he displayed no originality in his thinking. I am no judge of that. What is obvious is that he distrusted the efforts of the philosophers to square religion with reason. In that respect even Maimonides came in for a great deal of criticism at his hands. He felt that anything of this sort weakened the power of the Torah. He had probably seen how frequently weak arguments about the Torah turned out to be arguments against the Torah. Uncompromising acceptance of the Torah was of fundamental importance in the face of the official rejection of the Law by Christianity. He demanded unquestioning adherence to it.

His belief in the superiority of Jewish teaching is to be seen in his contrast between what he believed to be the biblical attitude toward societal organizations and the actual conditions of his day. Undoubtedly his personal experiences colored his views. It is equally without doubt that his humanistic interests and his reading of the ancient classics, had given him a point of view toward Society even before the political events in Portugal had further strengthened his intellectual opposition to the existing state of affairs. He emerged with views which, at first glance, seem radical. These views he sought for, and, therefore, naturally found in the Bible. Through them he then pronounced the Jewish criticism of the state of the world, and the Jewish hopes for a better world in time to come.

There is no need to enter extensively into a discussion of Abrabanel's social and political views. In recent months these views have received attention from Jewish scholars who indicate to what extent they were founded upon current ideas of the Humanistic Age.* What is important here is the fact that Abrabanel differed from the contemporary humanists in his attitude toward the religious civilization which each side represented. Both Christians and Jews criticised the existing state of affairs, the growing tyrannies, and the materialism of life. But Abrabanel had the usual advantage of the Jew in the Diaspora in that he did not have to take any part of the blame for the situation he criticised. The Bible taught by precept and example the sort of things which Humanity should avoid as well as that which it ought to follow. He made much of Samuel's opposition to the kingship. He indicated that David and Solomon defended royal power for selfish reasons. Essentially God is the only One to whom royal power can be attributed. As for a human king, he wrote that "this contagious plague has spread wherein one man arises and holds his people in restraint leading them like asses who cannot speak." The teachings of Judaism do not envisage anything of the sort, and in that respect, fundamental to Society, they are the only ones to follow. He branded civilization as an evil which the Judaism of the Messianic Age would set aright.

Abrabanel's attitude toward the Jewish people was intimately bound up with his views on Society. Among the three types of man in the world, the material-minded, the social-minded, and the spiritual-minded, the Jews represented the last. God created the world for the sake of the intelligent people who could learn to apprehend Him. Only Israel had been able to attain this, as witness the Prophets

*F. Baer in *Tarbiz* for June, 1937, and E. E. Urbach in *Monatscrift*, June, 1937.

and the entire biblical story of God's relation to the Jewish people. It follows that the world is dependent upon God's love for Israel, since it is through Israel that it can overcome the sins of civilization. Unfortunately the situation of the Jews in the diaspora, with their need to engage in commerce and the impossibility of their leading the simple life which is the only godly one, had brought about a deterioration among the Jews themselves. Two things were needed to restore the Jews to the proper state: a return to Palestine and a return to agriculture. But, then, Abrabanel expected these two changes to take place in the very near future, because the Messiah, already born, was to reveal himself in the next few years.

Nothing so impresses one about Abrabanel as the variety of his ideas. The classical and the mediaeval stand side by side with thoughts that have a strangely modern ring; the critical and historical blend into the purely mystical. But all this is not an uncoordinated medley. These ideas form a unity, a single point of view. It is easy to analyze this point of view and trace its parts to their sources. The admiration for republican government can be traced to the classics. The belief in the deterioration of the world since Creation might be midrashic, but was certainly influenced by St. Augustine. The objection to existing political conditions, while they sound modern and far ahead of Abrabanel's day, were really mediaeval. Abrabanel was not looking forward to democracy. He seems to have had no more appreciation of the lower classes than any other grandee of his day; the peasants were the earth-bound descendants of Cain. He merely objected to the usurpations by the king of the rights of customary-law which had limited royal authority throughout the Middle Ages. What was modern in him was the breadth of his point of view, his willingness to criticize the Bible and to accept biblical interpretations from any source.

The unifying element in all these ideas —ancient, mediaeval, and modern—was the ardent love which Abrabanel bore to his religion. One does not feel that his ideas were given a Jewish cast because they are found in his commentaries on the books of the Bible or in his defense of the rabbinic Haggada. One feels rather that he undertook the commentaries because everything he read and thought seemed to him to prove the greatness of Judaism. It has been remarked (on the basis of his son's statement that he "proved without 'maybe,' without 'if' "), that Abrabanel spoke with positiveness. But this was not necessarily the manner of a man who felt himself superior. There is no proof that Abrabanel was overconscious of his economic, political, or social position. It is just as likely that his authoritarian attitude was due to his inner need to establish the truth of his beliefs. It is not surprising that a man of such strong convictions should have preferred exile with his fellow-Jews to the physically comfortable, but mentally agonizing life chosen by many of his colleagues, including his co-worker, Abraham Senior, the official head of the Castilian Jewish community.

In one respect Abrabanel displayed inconsistency and love of authority. His constantly recurring complaint was that his literary work was being interrupted by calls upon his financial ability. It sounds like a pose, for he never refused any such call. Apparently he liked to be invited by the great of the earth to extricate them from their economic difficulties, as he did in Castile, in Naples, and in Venice. Or, he may have been compelled to do so by his own circumstances since he arrived in every one of these new domiciles after having lost most, if not all, of his fortune. This last may explain a more serious inconsistency, namely his failure to attempt any explanation of why he spoke as though despising worldly possessions, yet spent his time in amassing them. In this respect he reminds one of Walter Rathenau of modern times who also dreamed of an ideal organization of society while being the foremost prop of the society which he criticized.

V

How, then, shall we view Abrabanel with his mixture of qualities? What achievements stand out in his life? Certainly not his *Shtadlanut*. That he had opportunities to mitigate the misfortunes which overtook his fellow-Jews cannot be doubted. That he used these opportunities is quite likely, but by no means proved. That was primarily the task of Abraham Senior, the head of the Jewish community. The one occasion when Abrabanel faced the Catholic Monarchs and was defeated by Torquamada has taken such hold of the Jewish imagination that it has served to stamp Abrabanel as the typical *Shtadlan*. Yet that is only one instance, and an unsuccessful one. Infinitely more important than this sort of activity, even if it took place, was his literary defense of the Jews for the Jews. Abrabanel was above all an interpreter of Judaism. Rather than with *Shtadlanim* like Hasdai Ibn Shaprut and Samuel Ha-Naggid, he should be classed with Judah Ha-Levi and Maimonides, except that these used philosophy whereas he used the Bible.

But the one conclusion about him which cannot be overlooked is that he represented the end of an era. The entire mediaeval world was dying in the fifteenth century. Its politics, its chivalry, its modes of thought, and its art were in their last phase. The currents of classicism were not strong enough to create a new world in the face of the storm of religious fanaticism which soon broke over western Europe. Such a world would emerge but slowly during the next centuries as a result of other than classical of that period. One may speculate on how the Jewish mind might have transformed itself had the humanistic promise inherent in Isaac Abrabanel, and in Elijah Levitas, been permitted to realize itself. But the fact is that in Abrabanel, at any rate, the mediaeval is more prominent than the modern. His interests, his information, even his hopes were of a piece with the past. To that past he remained loyal, and of that past he is one of the finest and most inspiring representatives. When, centuries later, a new world gave new freedom to the Jewish people, Abrabanel was no longer in the direct line of intellectual development. Yet, if his is the final voice in the long and brilliant story of Spanish-Jewish culture, it is a dignified and worthy voice, characterized by a strong and deep loyalty to the noblest elements in his faith and his people.

An Epic of Fatherhood

By Dora Edinger

I

EVERYTHING Thomas Mann has written is autobiographical, or, as Goethe said of his own works, part of one great confession. But Thomas Mann would never have been the symbol of true German culture and this confession would have been a merely personal one had not the author, while still young, have already felt that his own experience was a typical, symbolical one. To understand the secret of his own fate, he felt, would mean understanding Germany as a whole.

To realize this truth we needs must learn something about Mann's personal history. From his father's side he comes from an unbroken line of North German Burghers, inhabitants of the ancient little and free state of Lubeck. This family had become somewhat exhausted and decadent when, through the marriage of his father to an exotic, gifted South American lady, new blood came to the old stock. The children that sprang from this unsual mixture were very talented, but they struggled until past adolescence

to harmonize their divergent inheritances. Two of the daughters failed; they died by their own hand. Both the very gifted sons, Thomas and his older brother, the famous author Heinrich, succeeded only by expressing in works of art what was in them. Then they felt personally secure. This purely individual problem Thomas Mann knew to be much more; he felt it to be a national one.

To his mind, Germany had lived a quiet provincial life, just as had his father's family, until new influences had come from the outside. These outside influences first had worked like a poison. All forces had to be mobilized to absorb the dangerous new ideas that had invaded Germany. But finally the true German culture emerged, a result of the marriage of new ideas to the old provincial traditions. This invasion by new ideas is in truth the theme of all Thomas Mann's works. Sometimes music, especially the music of Richard Wagner, is the symbol he uses to explain Europe's invasion; sometimes he speaks of the philosophy of Schopenhauer, who was the first to bring Indian (Buddhistic) ideas to Germany. In his best known book, *The Magic Mountain,* the forces attacking the seemingly happy and healthy German soul are pictured as a germ bringing fever and sickness. But in this sickness the German spirit marshals forces of resistance which it had never been aware of, and finally is transformed into something more than provincial, something truly human. *The Magic Mountain* ends with the hero's going out into the World War, Germany's great challenge. It had either to absorb or to defeat European influences. The author does not say whether Germany was successful. This book is really only an introduction. The author seemed not yet ready to give the full answer to the question which he was able to analyze with such great clarity.

But again a purely personal experience enabled him to offer what he was not able to offer until then. Thomas Mann had married very early a woman of Jewish descent, so that his own children were more mixed and more confused than he himself and his brothers and sisters had been. But the young father felt that he was not yet able to solve their problems in addition to his own, he kept his children a little aloof from his innermost life. Much later, when he had achieved inner security for himself, and when outer success had proved the importance of his work, he began to experience the full meaning of fatherhood.

II

Fatherland has rarely been a topic for great authors. There are so many beautiful works of art in all languages, from all ages, on motherhood; but fatherhood seems to have been a much more difficult subject. It was at the height of his career, when Thomas Mann was already looked upon as Germany's most eminent man of letters and teacher of a younger generation of thinkers and artists, that a fifth child was born to him. The birth of his fifth child, and the passionate love he felt for the delicate baby girl seem to have been his deepest emotional experiences. But in this overwhelming passion he felt an element of guilt, giving to this child what he had never given to the older ones nor to his youngest son born later. Religion, which played no part whatever until then in his philosophy, came to him. He wondered why, through this love, he felt himself linked to his forefathers and to the ultimate questions of man's purpose in life.

It seemed a mere chance that while he was thus pondering, a young artist brought him a set of drawings, asking him to introduce them with a foreword to the German public. These drawings illustrated the story of Joseph. Thomas Mann had never been familiar with the Bible. He took the old family Bible, inherited from his Lubeck forebears, and experienced the same shock that so many men experienced before him and will experience in times to come, the experience that makes the Bible the *one* book among so many great books. It answers quite

unexpectedly a man's innermost questions.

Thomas Mann found here the story of a father with many children. Only one, the youngest but one, was *the* child, the truly beloved one, and out of this injustice, which is a higher way both father and child knew to be no injustice at all, sprang struggle and passion and ultimate blessing. In looking back, he found that the Bible stresses the importance of the first born; but that always a younger, weaker child is the truly beloved one, although to achieve its fate it has to undergo pain and suffering. Thomas Mann put aside many other plans to begin to write the story of Jacob and his sons, and into this tale is woven much of his own deepest experiences. Rachel, the younger and weaker but the truly beloved one, is depicted as Thomas Mann had portrayed his own beloved bride in his former books. Joseph, the delicate, gifted, but somewhat irritating child-wonder, bears all the traits which Thomas Mann in his former description, bestowed on his little daughter.

Joseph, the beautiful, the image of his lovely mother, is closest to his father's heart; but thereby he steals what ought to be his brothers' and arouses their hatred and passion, so that at last they want to make away with this dreamer and boaster. In this ultimate tragedy, all members of the family are involved. Jacob is as guilty as are his murderous sons and so is Joseph, the victim, because he constantly boasted of the blessing which he knew would once come to him. This act of passion and crime belongs to the story; human life could never be truly human without passing through the deep valley of death and sin to be reborn out of it to a new state. It is always the weaker one who has to suffer, but by his suffering he makes his brothers ponder.

This book* was begun long before 1933 when it was first published, but Thomas Mann worked into it much of the present reality of the German people, giving to Joseph all typical Jewish traits, at the same time stressing that Leah's sturdy sons were fair and blue-eyed. After the publication of the first two volumes came Thomas Mann's exile from Germany, "which could hardly be called voluntary." The third volume could no longer be published in Germany. It is in truth *The Magic Mountain* rewritten from a higher level.

Joseph, no more a child, is growing up into manhood. After the three days in the pit he is reborn into another state. Even his name is changed. He remembers his past, but he knows that now he has to face life alone and like the hero in *The Magic Mountain,* he is attacked by all the forces of life. The feeble and winsome spirit claims him just as do dark and dangerous passions, and sex. At the end, Joseph is in a pit again to be reborn now to his true destiny. But the author is much more concerned with the loving, far-away father who, though not knowing that the beloved son is still alive, is in a mysterious way still linked to his fate. He experiences what every father has to undergo; he cannot be with his child in the decisive hour of trial. His mute image and all he has taught may however be with his son in this hour. Though this is taken from the Jewish, post-biblical tradition,* in this last volume both Jacob and Joseph show less typical Jewish traits than in the two former volumes. It seems that Thomas Mann's own sufferings, being deprived by exile from exercising direct influence on the fate of his beloved spiritual sons, the younger German generations, have formed most of this book. This great and loving teacher evidently hopes that his example and image may be with them in their present passionate trial.

Though these three volumes are cer-

**Joseph and His Brothers,* translated from the German by H. T. Lowe-Porter (Knopf, 1936).

*cf. *The Reconstructionist,* vol. I, No. 6.: The Background of Jewish Arabic Relations by Samuel Rosenblatt.

tainly not easy reading, they are rich with all the spiritual and cultural wealth of the harvest years of a great European. They give not only a better understanding of our dark and troubled days, but also hope of the coming dawn for humanity, when it truly grows up into man's estate.

CORRESPONDENCE

Sirs:

The pacifist in democratic lands—and it must be remembered that the pacifist exists only in democracies—faces a tragic dilemma. He may persist in his pacifism despite the dynamic changes which have transformed the international scene into an active struggle of ideologies. But he must recognize that this attitude encourages the triumph of the very forces which he seeks to hold in leash and which aim to destroy him. He must recognize too that this policy places him in the camp of the isolationists and encourages the militancy of dictatorship. This is the standpoint of the recent editorial "When the War Breaks Out" in the RECONSTRUCTIONIST.

On the other hand the pacifist proposes to modify the absoluteness of his principles. He is driven to this action because of the realization that the "peace at any price" viewpoint is dangerous in a world rampant with military dictators who threaten to overawe and to overwhelm the weaker democracies with the implied threat to Democracy everywhere. This type of pacifist is ready to forego momentarily his absolute ideal of peace and reserve judgment upon every war, declared or undeclared, as it arises. Hitherto this has been the non-pacifist attitude in contradistinction to the absolute pacifist. For this temporary change in his view he is frequently regarded as a traitor to the peace movement and is stigmatized as an opportunist.

Our retort is plain: In the first place, we refuse to become the allies, even by implication, of "isolationism" at home, and of dictatorship abroad. Secondly, we are aware that social forces are not static but dynamic, always subject to change. We refuse to apply "stationariness" to the peace movement because it is certain to kill it. As a social force the peace movement must not remain iron-clad and fixed; it must be adaptive and adjustable to international conditions as they exist today, to survive in the current struggle of societal organisms.

As a matter of fact the pacifists in this country are definitely divided as a result of this dilemma. The present Japanese invasion of China is the immediate cause of the split. Actually however the cleavage was inevitable with the rise of totalitarianism, particularly with the application by these states of totalitarian techniques to international affairs.

We uphold that wing of the American peace movement that advocates the idea that America must modify not its principles of peace but its procedure. We reaffirm absolute allegiance to peace. At the same time we recognize that the neutrality policy, as adopted by Congress at its last session, does not conduce to peace, as we assumed, because it places a premium upon preparedness, upon power and aggression, and penalizes the nations that are small and weak from a military standpoint. Moreover the neutrality policy aids, directly or indirectly, the fascist and every other type of military state; it is a standing invitation to the militant nations that they may execute their will against weak peoples without interference, without hindrance; the weak cannot even purchase materials here with which to defend themselves.

Furthermore it is even problematical upon mature consideration whether it is a practical insurance against embroilment in war. This is certain however: it endangers the democratic system by giving free rein to the plans of the authoritarian, totalitarian, military regimes.

For these reasons we believe that the time has come for organized pacifism in this country to change its attitude towards neutrality. We should seek the modification of our neutrality laws so as to permit the condemnation of the aggressor in any war, declared or undeclared. We should formulate a program that will make pacifism the champion of Democracy. We should educate the American people to demand that our Government abandon isolationism and substitute therefor a policy that shall attempt to assure peace by cooperation with the democratic peoples of the world in recreating respect for the pledged word and the recognized body of law and usages in international relations.

It is due to these considerations that a section of the peace movement has approved the Administration's course of action in the present war in China. We however hold that the entire peace movement should (1) approve the course of the Roosevelt Administration in the present Sino-Japanese war; (2) it should urge the modification of the neutrality laws of this country so as to provide for the public proclamation of the aggressor in any conflict and (3) that the foreign policy of this country be based upon the cooperation of the democratic countries in order to devise means to encourage respect for law and treaties in international affairs.

With such a policy in the forefront the peace movement will survive because it shall have contributed its strength and wisdom to the solution of the problems that fascism has imposed on international life. Then it will be in a position to resume with dignity its attitude of absoluteness, conscious of its power to influence men and affairs.

RABBI HERBERT PARZEN.

December 20, 1937.